



BreastScreen WA Information for GPs

Leaking breast implants



What to do when a screening mammogram detects a loss of integrity in a woman's breast implants

Screening mammograms may detect a loss of integrity in a woman's breast implants. BreastScreen WA may advise women to consult their GP for further advice if implant rupture is suspected on the screening examination.

FAQs

What is a breast implant?

Breast implants are inserted to enlarge or change the shape of the breasts or to reconstruct the breast following breast cancer surgery. Implants are placed either between the breast tissue and the pectoralis major muscle, or behind the pectoralis muscle. The two main types of breast implant used in Australia are silicone and saline implants.

What happens when a breast implant leaks?

The risk of breast implant rupture increases as the implant ages and 50 per cent of implants will show signs of loss of integrity at 10 years post insertion.

Saline implants – a silicone envelope filled with sterile saline. If the implant shell leaks, a saline implant will collapse and the saline will be absorbed by the body.

Silicone implants – a silicone envelope filled with silicone gel. If the implant leaks the gel may remain within the implant shell or it may leak into the surrounding area. It is not always obvious when a silicone implant has ruptured as it may not collapse.

How can a GP assess a woman with a leaking breast implant?

With leaking saline breast implants, most women will be aware of a reduction in their breast size and shape. When silicone breast implants rupture there are often no signs or symptoms.

However, some women may experience:

- pain / burning
- lumps surrounding the implant or in the ipsilateral axilla as silicone migrates locally
- a change in breast size or shape and softening or hardening of the breast.

Investigations that can provide further information about implant integrity are ultrasound and MRI. It is recommended that GPs liaise with a breast plastic surgeon about further management.

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Should women with breast implants have a mammogram at BreastScreen WA?

Yes. Women who have breast implants should have regular screening mammograms every two years if they are in the recommended age group.

Can women with concerns about their breast implants come to BreastScreen WA to assess the problem?

No. Women who notice a problem with their breast implants should see their doctor for a clinical assessment. BreastScreen WA was established to detect early breast cancer in asymptomatic women.

Are mammograms safe for women with implants?

Mammograms are considered safe for women with breast implants.

- **Ruptures and leaks**

There is an extremely small chance that the pressure placed on the implant during the mammogram process could cause the implants to rupture or break.

In women who have implants which have already ruptured or started to leak, it is possible having a mammogram could increase the amount of silicone or saline spreading into the breast tissue.

- **Change in shape**

Some women who have implants develop unusually hard breasts. This is known as capsular contracture. It occurs because the scar tissue surrounding the implant tightens. It is possible that the pressure of the mammogram could cause the scar tissue to crack. If this occurs, breasts may have a different shape and softer texture afterwards. However, it cannot be guaranteed that both breasts will be affected equally.

- **Radiation exposure**

Screening mammograms use a very low dose of radiation and for most women, the benefits of having regular screening mammograms outweigh any possible risk from radiation exposure. Screening mammography for women with breast implants requires more X-rays to be taken.

Are women with breast implants more likely to develop breast cancer?

At present there is no evidence that breast implants increase breast cancer risk, however the presence of breast implants may make screening less sensitive as a large proportion of the natural breast tissue may be obscured.

www.breastscreen.health.wa.gov.au

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